

RELEASE IN FULL

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Subject: Fw: (Reuters) Kyrgyzstan asks Russia to help quell ethnic clashes

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Subject: (Reuters) Kyrgyzstan asks Russia to help quell ethnic clashes

OSH - Kyrgyzstan appealed for Russian help to stop ethnic fighting that has killed at least 62 and left parts of its second-largest city in flames, the worst violence since the president was toppled in April. The interim government in Kyrgyzstan, which hosts U.S. and Russian military bases, said it was powerless to stop armed gangs from burning down the homes and businesses of ethnic Uzbeks in parts of Osh. Gun battles raged throughout the night.

"We need the entry of outside armed forces to calm the situation down," interim government leader Roza Otunbayeva told reporters. "We have appealed to Russia for help and I have already signed such a letter for President Dmitry Medvedev."

Russian PM Putin and Otunbayeva discussed the situation in a telephone call on June 12, the Russian government's press service said, without giving details.

A Reuters correspondent in Osh said gun battles had taken place through the night in an Uzbek neighbourhood. Gas was shut off to Osh and some neighborhoods have no electricity. "Entire streets are on fire," Interior Ministry spokesman Rakhmatillo Akhmedov said. "The situation is very bad. There is no sign of it stopping. Homes have been set ablaze."

Otunbayeva said Osh was also facing a humanitarian crisis as food was running out. She said her government had decided to open the border to Uzbekistan to allow fleeing Uzbeks to escape, although it was not clear who controlled the frontier. One witness said some women and children had made it across to the Uzbek town of Marhamat, 638 miles from Osh, and camps had been set up for those without family in Uzbekistan. A spokeswoman for the Kyrgyz Health Ministry said at least 62 people had been killed and 790 wounded in the violence, which is taking place in the southerly power base of former president Kurmanbek Bakiyev, deposed in April by a popular revolt.

"Everywhere is burning: Uzbek homes, restaurants and cafes. The whole town is covered in smoke," local human rights worker Dilmurad Ishanov, an ethnic Uzbek, said by telephone from Osh. "We don't need the Kyrgyz authorities. We need Russia. We need troops. We need help."

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